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ABSTRACT

The relation between a real-world category (sex) and a linguistic category (gender) is examined. The gender system of Indo-European languages is discussed, and the way gender works in Greek, one of the older Indo-European languages, is examined at some length. The conclusion is that, but for the existence of separate gender-sensitive adjectival and pronominal forms, grammatical gender would not exist in a language like Greek. Total loss of grammatical gender in a language like English happens when adjectival endings signaling gender distinctions disappear by way of phonetic change. The gender system in Finnish, a language without grammatical gender, is described. Finally, a few general comments are made on the question of the relation between sex and gender and on efforts by the feminist movement in the United States to rid English of what are termed sexist words. (Author/AMH)

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SEX AND GENDER IN NATURAL LANGUAGE

W. Keith Percival

Abstract: The topic of this paper is the relation between a real-world category (sex) and a linguistic category (gender). In the first part, the gender-system of Indo-European languages is discussed. Then the gender-system in a language without grammatical gender is described. Finally, a few general comments are hazarded on the difficult question of the relation between sex and gender. The paper closes with a discussion of recent puristic efforts by the feminist movement in the U.S. to rid English of what are termed sexist words.

Let me begin by defining my terms. By sex, I mean the division of organic beings into two classes for reproductive purposes. Obviously, sex is not confined to the human species, and the linguistic correlates of sex, accordingly, affect the terms referring to various organic species and genera. By gender, I mean any grammatical classification of referring and descriptive terms. Linguists usually distinguish grammatical from natural gender. By grammatical gender, they mean a set of classes which do not correspond or correspond imperfectly to the division of the sexes or the division of beings into animate and inanimate. Natural gender, on the other hand, is any system of word-classes which does correspond, or at least corresponds fairly closely, to the division of the sexes and/or the animate-inanimate distinction.

I shall first discuss sex and gender in Indo-European languages, and then say something about non-Indo-European languages, and finally draw some tentative conclusions. The subject is, of course, oceanic, and I can do no more here than bring up a couple of the more salient problems connected with it. At the same time, it raises an interesting general theoretical question in that gender furnishes us with a prime example of how indirect the relation between a linguistic and a real-world category can sometimes be. It therefore provides us with valuable data on which to base general theories about the nature and origin of lexical categories. The purpose of this paper is modest: to bring some of these problems to your attention.

In an article which appeared in the Dutch linguistic journal in 1959, the Hungarian linguist István Fodor starts out with the following declaration: 'The category of grammatical gender is one of the still unsolved puzzles of linguistic science. It is not only with regard to the circumstances of its origin that there has never been complete agreement among linguists, there still is much divergence of opinion as to its function in a particular language system and, in general, as to its definition' (Fodor 1959:1).

FL 012 504

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Undaunted by this warning, let us begin our exploration with a look at Indo-European languages. Let me remind you, in passing, that Indo-European languages are not the only ones that have grammatical gender, or more generally, arbitrary lexical classes. The most notoriously complicated systems occur in some of the Bantu languages in sub-Saharan Africa, with simpler systems in many of the languages of North Africa.

As a useful point of departure I shall quote a couple of paragraphs from a contemporary handbook of Indo-European comparative grammar by Oswald Szemerényi: 'Gender is a feature of nouns in accordance with which certain words referring to a noun (adjectives and definite pronouns) assume different forms. It is to some extent related to sex (e.g. father and son are masculine, mother and daughter are feminine), but sex is not the decisive factor. This is obvious from the fact there were three genders in Proto-Indo-European, which are preserved in almost all Indo-European languages (Sanskrit, Greek, Latin, Celtic, Germanic, Slavic). Subsequently, several languages lost one of the genders, usually the neuter, and nouns which had originally been neuter became either masculine or feminine. This happened in Lithuanian, and we have the same thing attested earlier in Romance. Hittite, on the other hand, which is attested early [in the mid-second millennium B.C.], had only a common gender (for the masculine and feminine) and a neuter gender. Subsequent loss leads to a system with only one gender (i.e. no gender at all), as has taken place in English and Persian, and as had already happened by the earliest attested stage of Armenian.

'The Indo-European system of three genders must, however, have evolved from a two-gender system. This is indicated by the fact that in archaic inflectional classes the masculine and feminine behave alike and differ from the neuter (compare, for instance, Greek patēr 'father,' mētēr 'mother'). It would be a mistake, however, to regard the rise (Entstehung) of the feminine gender as a process which had not yet been completed in Proto-Indo-European; it is clear that the feminine is fully developed even in the so-called peripheral languages. [Szemerényi has Latin and Celtic in mind here.]

'Meillet answered the question as to how the early Indo-European two-gender system arose by pointing to the fact that for certain concepts two distinct expressions existed, one of which was animate (masc. or fem.) and the other inanimate (neuter); compare Latin ignis--Greek pyr 'fire,' Latin aqua--Greek hydōr, both in Gothic ahwa--watō 'water'). The further question as to how the feminine detached itself from the animate class has recently become once more the subject of lively discussions. One notes a return to the earlier theory that the general development of -a- and -i- as a feminine marker started out from the pronouns (e.g. *sā and *sī), but that these forms had been modelled on certain nouns which accidentally had one of these endings, e.g. *gʷenā 'woman'' (Szemerényi 1970:143-44).

Let us now look more closely at the way gender works in one of the older Indo-European languages which has all three genders, namely Greek.

Nouns referring to males are generally masculine, and nouns referring to females feminine. Thus, ho nautēs 'seaman,' ho stratiōtēs 'soldier,' as against hē gynē 'woman,' hē korē 'maiden' (see Smyth 1963:45). Nouns referring to inanimate objects may be assigned to any of the three genders: logos 'speech' is masculine, nēsos 'island' is feminine, and teichos 'wall' is neuter. Certain nouns referring to human beings can be either masculine or feminine depending on whether they refer to a male or a female, e.g. ho pais 'boy,' hē pais 'girl'; ho theos 'god,' hē theos 'goddess.' This applies to some nouns referring to animals, e.g. ho and hē bous 'bull/cow'; ho and hē hippos 'horse/mare.' Such nouns were said, traditionally, to have common gender.

Other animal names are always masculine or always feminine, regardless of whether they refer to males or females, e.g. ho lagos 'hare,' he alōpēx 'fox.' In traditional grammar, nouns of this kind were said to have epicene gender. This is a handy term, and we shall return to the phenomenon of epicene nouns in due course. Finally, it is worth mentioning that there is also a certain amount of complete heteronymy in the terms for male and female animals. Obvious examples are the words for 'father' and 'mother' (patēr and mētēr).

While these are the general types of gender assignment, the system is not quite so simple as this. First, the assignment of gender to sexless referents is not completely arbitrary. It depends on two factors: form and meaning. Let us consider meaning first. Names of winds, months, and most rivers are masculine. For example, ho boreas 'the north wind,' ho hekatombaion 'Hecatombaeon,' and ho Kēphissos 'Cephissus.' Interestingly, the words for wind, month, and river in Greek are masculine (namely anemos, mēn, potamos).

The names of almost all countries, islands, cities, trees, and plants are feminine: hē Attikē 'Attica,' hē Dēlos 'Delos,' hē Korinthos 'Corinth,' hē pitys 'pine,' hē ampelos 'vine.' The gender here seems to follow that of hē gē or hē khōra 'land, country,' hē nēsos 'island,' hē drys 'tree.' Most abstract nouns, i.e. nouns referring to qualities or conditions, are feminine: hē aretē 'virtue,' hē eunoia 'goodwill,' hē takhytēs 'swiftness,' hē elpis 'hope.'

Diminutives are neuter regardless of whether the referent is animate or inanimate, or if animate whether male or female: to anthrōpion 'mannikin' (ho anthrōpos 'human being'), to paidion 'little child' (ho or hē pais 'child'), to gynaion 'little woman' (hē gynē 'woman'). It may be pointed out that the words teknon 'child' and andrapodon 'captive' are also neuter. In passing, we may note a curious fact emphasized more than once by the great French Indo-Europeanist Antoine Meillet (1946:217; 1952:24), namely that while the words for trees in the older Indo-European languages are feminine, words for the corresponding fruit produced by those trees are regularly neuter, e.g. Greek sykē (fem.) 'fig tree,' sykon (neuter) 'fig.'

Metalinguistic expressions are likewise always neuter: to hymeis 'the word you,' to gnōthi seauton 'the saying "learn to know thyself,"' to alpha 'the letter alpha.' Hence, the initial interrogative pronoun in a sentence such as what did you say? would be in the neuter gender.

Let us now turn our attention to the formal aspects of gender in Indo-European. For this purpose, we must first take a look at the morphology of the noun. Formally, an Indo-European noun consists of three parts: a root, a stem-forming suffix, and an ending. In some cases, the suffix or the ending is zero, or both suffix and ending may be zero. For instance, the Greek word hippos 'horse' is made up of the root hipp, the stem-forming suffix -o, and the ending -s. We refer to the word minus the final ending as the stem, hence hippo-. In the case of the word naus 'ship' (fem.), the root is nau-, we have no stem-forming suffix, and the ending is again -s. In a word like ther 'wild beast' (masc.), we have a zero ending as well as a zero suffix.

Each ending is appropriate to the intersection of a case and a number category. Thus, the -s of hippos is appropriate to the nominative singular. However, the precise phonetic shape of an ending depends on the type of stem with which it occurs. Thus, the nominative plural ending of vowel stems (i.e. stems which end in a vowel) is usually -i (hippoi 'horses'), while the same case for consonant stems usually ends in -es (thēres 'wild animals'). Some endings, but not all, are gender-sensitive. Thus, neuter stems take -a as the ending of the nominative plural (and this is true whether they are vowel or consonantal stems), e.g. the nominative plural of dōron 'gift' is dōra, and the nominative plural of sōma 'body' is sōmata (note that the final t of the stem is deleted in word-final position). The gender-sensitive endings are the nominative and accusative singular, dual, and plural, and the vocative singular. Other endings are the same for all three genders. But note that in terms of endings we have a contrast between neuter and non-neuter: the masculine and feminine genders are not distinguishable in terms of ending.

Another interesting fact is that as regards case endings neuter nouns are underdifferentiated in comparison with masculine and feminine nouns. The rule is that neuter nouns never have different forms in the nominative and accusative, and this applies to all three numbers. In vowel stems, the ending of the nominative and accusative singular neuter is the same as the accusative singular of the masculines and feminines, hence dōron 'gift' like anthrōpon 'human being.' In consonant stems, on the other hand, the neuters have a zero ending in the nominative and accusative singular, hence sōma 'body.' It follows from this that neuter nouns are the only ones which are marked for gender if one considers their nominative singular forms, e.g. methy 'honey wine,' zygon 'yoke.'

Let us now look at stem-forming suffixes. This is where a distinction between masculine and feminine may have already existed in Proto-Indo-European. We observe, in fact, a number of characteristic

feminine stem formatives in the older Indo-European languages, in particular a, i, and u. Here I shall use Sanskrit examples, since the situation is not quite so perspicuous in Greek. Thus, we have in Sanskrit aśvā 'mare' as against aśva 'stallion,' vṛkī 'female wolf' as against vṛka 'male wolf,' janitrī 'progenitrix' as against janitṛ 'progenitor,' naptī 'female descendant' as against napāt 'male descendant.' In this connection, see Brugmann 1904:329-30, 354, and Jakobson 1932.

But note that there were no special stem-forming suffixes appropriate to the masculine, for a word like vṛka referred to wolves regardless of sex, and could denote a male wolf only when used specifically in contradistinction to the feminine form vṛkī. Note also that in terms of stem-forming suffixes, the feminine is contrasted with both the masculine and the neuter. Hence, the feminine is the gender which sticks out here, as it were. In terms of endings, on the other hand, it is the neuter which is aberrant, the masculine and feminine having for the most part the same endings.

Let us move on now to other word-classes. Adjectives and participles in Indo-European are inflected like nouns, that is, they take the same endings as nouns. Moreover, the rules of syntax require that an adjective or participle should agree with the noun it goes with in gender, number, and case. This means that an adjective agreeing with a neuter noun takes neuter endings, and an adjective agreeing with a feminine noun has a feminine stem-forming suffix, and that adjectives occur in two stems, one for the masculine and neuter, and the other for the feminine. Thus, the Greek adjective makros 'long' has a masculine and neuter stem makro- and a feminine stem makra-. The nominative plural forms are, then, makroi for the masculine, makrai for the feminine, and makra for the neuter. And this also applies to participles.

In addition, there is what grammarians usually call agreement according to sense. In the case of gender, this means that a neuter noun referring to an animate being is often found accompanied by an adjective or participle in one of the animate genders. Smyth (1963:263, para. 950) cites an example from Thucydides (5.60) in which the neuter noun stratopedon 'army,' is conjoined with a masculine plural participle and a finite verb in the plural: to stratopedon en aitia ekhontes (masc. pl.) ton Agin anekhōroun (plural verb) 'The army returned holding Agis at fault.'

If an adjective goes with a pair of conjoined substantives of different gender, the general rule is that the adjective is put in the masculine plural if the two nouns are non-neuter. For instance, Smyth (1963:277, para. 1055) quotes a sentence from Xenophon's Cyropaedia (3.1.7) which reads as follows: 'When he saw that his father and mother and brothers and wife had been made prisoners of war, he broke into tears,' (in Greek hōs eide patera te kai mētera kai adelphous kai tēn heautou gynaika aikhmalōtous [masc. pl.] gegenēmenous [masc. pl.], edakryse). Smyth

expresses the rule as follows: 'When the persons are of different gender, the masculine prevails.'

Finally before leaving the Indo-European system we should look at the pronouns. First, there is a relatively small class of personal pronouns, and then a larger class of demonstratives, indefinite pronouns, relative pronouns, and the like. These two classes differ in that the personal pronouns are all genderless, that is to say, they are inflected for number and case only. However, Indo-European appears to have had no pronouns of the third person, various demonstrative pronouns being used instead. So a pronoun like egō 'I' in Greek does not show gender, while a pronoun such as autos, which functions as a third person pronoun but was not a personal pronoun originally, is inflected for gender. So one can distinguish between 'I saw her' and 'I saw him' in ancient Greek.

But the situation as regards the non-personal pronouns is not so clear. Some of them, like houtos 'this,' ekeinos 'that,' and the relative pronoun, distinguish all three genders, while others, like the interrogative and indefinite pronoun tis 'who? somebody,' distinguish only neuter from non-neuter. However, this does not appear to be a question of semantics, for other interrogative and indefinite pronouns (e.g. poteros 'which of two?' poios 'what kind of?') do distinguish masculine from feminine.

Obviously, but for the existence of separate gender-sensitive adjectival and pronominal forms, grammatical gender would not exist in a language like Greek. That is to say, remove these special gender-sensitive forms, and grammatical gender would disappear altogether. And this is precisely what has happened in languages like Persian and English which have lost grammatical gender over the past millennium or (in the case of Persian) perhaps the past two millennia.

Accordingly, the total loss of grammatical gender (in, say, a language like English) happens like this. The adjectival endings which signal gender distinctions disappear by phonetic change. This means that the adjectives become invariant. There is then nothing for agreement rules to apply to. It is interesting to note that in Old English, which is after all separated from us by only thirty or so generations, gender assignment was just as arbitrary as in Latin, Greek, or modern Russian; that is to say, it could run counter to natural gender. So the compound noun wīfman 'woman' was masculine because its final member man was masculine, while wīf 'woman' was neuter, as also was cild 'child' (cf. Modern German Kind, Swedish barn, which are also neuter). The words for 'horn,' 'end,' and 'day' were masculine, the words for 'sorrow,' 'glove,' 'plum,' and 'pipe' feminine, and so forth. Gender was determined by what forms of the adjective were used to accompany a noun, and gender could not be predicted from declension, as is the case in some Indo-European languages (in modern Russian, for example).

But an interesting fact is that there was a tendency as early as the Old English period for nouns to be assigned gender on natural grounds. So wīfman was often treated as a feminine noun, and the neuter pronoun hit 'it' was used to refer to an inanimate object regardless of the grammatical gender of the noun in question. Thus, in Aelfric's Homilies we read: 'Etadh thisne hlāf (masculine), hit is min līchama,' for modern English 'Eat this bread, it is my body.' (See Baugh & Cable 1978:166.)

But the loss of grammatical gender does not mean, of course, that speakers distinguish between referents only in terms of animacy, not in terms of sex. There are still separate third-person singular (but not plural) animate pronouns, he and she. An interesting development in early modern English is the appearance of a new neuter possessive form its to replace earlier his, so that we now have his, her, its paralleling he, she, it. Similarly, Modern English has developed a distinction in the relative pronouns between who (animate) and which (inanimate); compare earlier usage as exemplified in the opening phrase of the Lord's Prayer in the Authorized Version: 'Our Father, which art in heaven.'

There are also separate, largely inherited, lexical items (bull and cow, goose and gander, king and queen, and so forth). Moreover, for many animal species and also some other animate categories, we have a noun to refer to members of the species or category regardless of sex, like the epicene nouns of the classical languages. e.g. terms such as horse or monarch. (It is interesting to note that many of these terms were originally neuter, e.g. horse, sheep, deer, swine, etc.) The difference, however, is that in a language like English the distinction between epicene and common nouns has altogether disappeared.

In ideal cases, there are three forms, a masculine, a feminine, and a common or epicene term, as in the case of king, queen, and monarch. Sometimes, the epicene or common term is the same as the masculine or the same as the feminine term, e.g. author subsumes male as well as female authors, and the term nurse both male and female nurses. In other cases, there are only two terms, one of which is common and the other masculine or feminine, but not both. This is the situation we have with a word like goose, which is actually an old feminine noun, now common gender, and the contrasting gander which is masculine, and we have no special word for 'female goose.' In other cases it works the other way, and there is a specifically feminine term but no masculine term, e.g. authoress.

An interesting phenomenon is the use of compound nouns to refer to sexually differentiatable animals, so you have he-goat, she-goat, nanny goat, billy goat, lady doctor, male nurse, etc. Until recently, I had always assumed that this feature was peculiar to languages without grammatical gender, but that is not the case. Latin has the expressions piscis fēmina 'female fish (literally, woman-fish),' porcus fēmina 'sow (literally, woman-pig),' and vitellus mās 'male yoke (i.e. a yolk which would produce a male chick).' These expressions are interesting in that the head-nouns in all cases, piscis, porcus, and vitellus, are masculine.

An interesting situation exists in many mainland Scandinavian dialects such as standard Swedish, where the masculine and feminine have fallen together in a common gender, which results in two genders, a neuter and a non-neuter. However, the animate third-person pronouns 'he' and 'she' (Swedish han and hon) still distinguish gender, and there is an inanimate third-person pronoun with two forms, a common (den) and a neuter (det). Hence, to refer pronominally to an inanimate object which is denoted by a common noun, like kniv 'knife,' one uses den, while if one wants to refer to an inanimate noun which is denoted by a neuter noun, like bord 'table,' one uses det.

However, remnants of the old system of grammatical gender remain. One is the word klocka 'clock,' when used in telling the time. The customary form of the question is Hur mycket är klockan? 'What time is it? How much is the clock?' and the answer is Hon är sju 'she is seven.' The other remnant is the word for human being människa, which is feminine. So if one is discussing the attributes of man, one might say hon har två ben 'she has two legs.' This is rather bizarre because in nearby Norwegian and Danish the corresponding noun menniske is neuter, so in those languages one would have to say det har to ben 'it has two legs.' Why Swedish has retained precisely these two feminine nouns, while all the others have acquired common gender (along with all the inanimate masculines) is not clear. It is also interesting that the words for human being in Scandinavian languages are either feminine or neuter, whereas in other Indo-European languages which have a word for human being different from the word for male human being, we have either a masculine noun (as in the case of Greek anthrōpos, German Mensch and Russian celovek), or a noun with common gender (as in the case of Latin homō).

Another striking thing about a language like Swedish is that the neuter gender of the word barn 'child' has been retained, and there are even a few new words like hembiträde 'maid,' which are also neuter. One might well categorize words like barn and människa as epicene, it seems to me. Compare this situation with, say, the fact that the normal (unmarked) word for cat in French is masculine (le chat), and in modern German and Russian it is feminine (Katze, koška), while the word for rabbit is masculine in Russian (zajatj) and neuter in German (Kanninchen).

In a sense, the Scandinavian situation is halfway between the full-fledged system of grammatical gender of the kind that we find in, say, modern German or Russian, and the genderless system we have in present-day English. Not quite halfway, in that there are many dialects of Swedish and Norwegian which have retained all three genders. This is particularly true of the western Norwegian dialects on which Norway's second official language Nynorsk is based, in contradistinction to the speech of the capital, which has the two-gender system.

Let us now move on to completely genderless languages and consider Finnish, a Uralic language, in which nouns are not classified in genders and adjectives are invariable. There are two third-person pronouns, but

they differ only in terms of animacy: hän is used indifferently to refer to males or females, and se denotes inanimate referents. Correspondingly, there is an animate interrogative pronoun kuka 'who?' with an inanimate counterpart mikä 'what?' Similar systems exist in other Uralic languages like Estonian, Lappish, and Hungarian, in the Altaic languages, such as Turkish, Tartar, etc. and in the non-Indo-European languages of Asia.

I am familiar with an Austronesian language of northern Sumatra, Toba-Batak, which has no gender classes and a single third-person animate pronoun. However, the situation is complicated in Toba-Batak by the fact that the speakers have a complicated system of exogamous sibs. A person must always marry a member of another sib, and when referring to or addressing a member of another sib speakers regularly use the corresponding plural pronoun. This means that a girl refers to her brother as nasida 'they,' because when she is married she will belong to her husband's sib, which will necessarily be a different one from her brother's. (Sumatra is a man's world, as my informant once put it!) The same rule applies to brothers referring to or addressing their sisters. Similarly, in addressing one's sibblings one uses the singular ho to sibblings of one's own sex, and the plural hamu to sibblings of the opposite sex. Of course, one also uses hamu to non-family members of the same sex who happen not to be members of one's own sib.

But Toba-Batak, of course, does refer differentially to males and females in other ways. For instance, there is a word hatoban 'slave,' and a male slave is hatoban lahi-lahi and a female slave hatoban boru-boru. For male animals the term is tunggal, so a male elephant is gaja tunggal, a male horse hoda tunggal, and so forth. In the case of human beings, there is in many cases heteronymy. Thus, father and mother are distinguished by unrelated words: amang and inang. Sibblings are distinguished by age and according to whether they are of the same sex as the speaker or the opposite sex. The same term (ito) is used by brothers to refer to their sisters as is used by sisters to refer to their brothers. An older sibbling of the same sex is called hahang (or akkang), while a younger sibbling of the same sex is called anggi.

I think we are ready now to make a few general statements about sex and gender in natural language. First of all, we can establish two extremes: complete heteronymy at one end of the pole, and complete homonymy at the other. A good example of complete heteronymy would be the words bull and cow in English, and an example of homonymy the English word parent. Next, we have the distinction between languages with grammatical gender and genderless languages. Languages with grammatical gender have an option open to them which the genderless languages do not have, and that is to utilize different inflectional endings to distinguish male from female referents, e.g. Spanish hermano and hermana, as compared with heteronymous Italian fratello and sorella and (genderless) English brother and sister. Genderless languages, however, have available the use of compound nouns (like English nanny goat), and also the use of derivational affixes (e.g. English actor/actress).

But note that modern languages which have grammatical gender also resort to these devices. Thus, French has terms like femme médecin, elephant femelle, Russian has zenščina-vrač, and German has Arzt/Ärztin, Schauspieler/Schauspielerin. The French femme médecin is an especially interesting case, in that the normal procedure for coining feminine nouns (adding an orthographic -e) is ruled out in the case of médecin 'doctor,' because there already exists a noun médecine, which means 'medicine.'

From a semantic perspective, one can distinguish cases where the speaker has the choice of a term for a member of a species regardless of sex plus different terms for the male and the female, from cases where the choice is more limited, and this applies both to languages with gender and to genderless languages. So in English, for example, we have a plethora of terms to refer to the horse, depending on sex and age (foal, filly, colt, gelding), together with the word horse to refer to an equine quadruped regardless of sex and age. In other cases, we have no term for the species. In Britain, for instance, there is no ordinary layman's term for gallinacious bird: hen is the feminine term, cock is the masculine term, chicken means a young bird, chick a newborn bird, fowl is largely Biblical, and poultry is a collective.

It would clearly be interesting to collect all the common cases of terms for animal species and see how many of them can be explained by cultural factors. In the case of horses and chickens, one can point to the fact that a farmer normally keeps few male chickens, whereas the horse breeder has a different attitude toward mares and stallions. I might mention the story of the elderly aunt, obviously an urban dweller, who was once heard to exclaim: 'All cows terrify me, especially bulls.' The bull, like the rooster, is relatively speaking a rarity.

The interesting thing is, of course, that the ideal situation does exist in many instances. For example, in English we have the triple king, queen, and monarch. But in many cases one term is missing. How we make up for the lack of the missing terms is, I think, a largely unexplored topic. Ordinary colloquial English has no term corresponding to the anthropologist's sibbling, while German and Swedish have one, but it occurs only in the plural: Geschwister and syskon.

The case of the personal pronouns is another interesting problem. There are languages like Finnish, Hungarian, Turkish, and Chinese, which have a single genderless third-person singular pronoun, and no way of distinguishing male from female referents. There are then languages in the opposite category which have separate words for 'he' and 'she,' but no genderless form: this is the general rule in Indo-European languages. So far I have not run into a language which combines the advantages of both systems. There are also Indo-European languages which extend the gender distinction to the third-person plural pronoun, like Polish and Spanish, and others, like the Germanic languages, which neutralize the distinction. Again, most Indo-European languages do not mark the second-person pronouns for gender, but there are quite a few which have developed different forms

in recent centuries, e.g. Polish pan and pani, as against Russian genderless vy, Portuguese o senhor and a senhora, as compared with Spanish usted, which is genderless.

Obviously, it is much easier to rectify a lexical deficiency than to change the gender-system. That is to say, lexical coinage is a regular and continuous process, but there are no cases on record of a language changing its gender-system by piecemeal manipulation.

What does occur is a constant tug-of-war between the formal classification and the semantic, or in other words between grammatical and natural gender. Accordingly, we have cases of neuter nouns with female referents becoming feminine, e.g. German dialect die Fräulein as contrasted with standard German das Fräulein, feminine nouns with male referents becoming masculine, e.g. Italian guida (fem.) 'guide,' borrowed into French as le guide, or epicene nouns assuming genders to suit the momentary referent, as in Latin haec lupus 'female wolf.' Another tendency is for feminine abstract nouns to become masculine when they refer to males, as in Spanish el cura 'vicar,' from the Latin feminine noun cūra 'care,' and Russian starosta 'village elder,' from earlier starosta 'old age.'

Another interesting development we observe is the tendency in some cases for a noun to change its morphology to harmonize with natural gender. For instance, Latin had a number of feminine nouns in -us, which is a predominantly masculine ending, e.g. nūrus 'daughter-in-law' and socrus 'mother-in-law.' These nouns in course of time acquired the normal feminine ending -a, and we have in present-day Italian la nuora and la suocera. An example from antiquity is the addition of the characteristic nominative singular masculine ending -s to Greek masculine ā-stems, e.g. neanias 'young man.' Note also the genitive neaniou, with the characteristic masculine ending -ou.

From the fact that we observe both tendencies operating it seems clear that grammatical gender and sex classification are separate phenomena. But at the same time, if they were completely separate they would not affect each other at all. In other words, they are separate, but not unrelated.

This raises the fascinating question of how the Indo-European gender-system arose. Roughly speaking, there are two types of theories about the origin of grammatical gender in Indo-European. What we might call the traditional theory derives grammatical gender from a process of personification by which inanimate referents are imagined to have sexual attributes. For an eloquent statement see, for instance, Harris 1771:41-62. This theory has been abandoned, chiefly because it does not account for the majority of cases in which no such act of the imagination is observed to occur. Even granted that grammatical gender originated in that way, it seems implausible to argue that it remains in force by virtue of the same principle. For why should Greeks regard the mouse as having male attributes and the fox as possessing female qualities, while the Germans do

the very opposite? And how can one explain the fact that in some Romance languages, the word for 'sea' (originally neuter) has become masculine (e.g. Italian il mare), in others feminine (e.g. French la mer and Roumanian), and in one Romance language actually vacillates between the two (e.g. Spanish el mar, but sometimes la mar).

The alternative theory is that the system of grammatical gender is arbitrary. This idea seems to crop up as early as the Middle Ages. Thus, Remi d'Auxerre (died about 908) argued that the reason Latin passer 'sparrow' and milvus 'kite' are masculine, while aquila 'eagle' and mūstēla 'weasel' are feminine is because scholars arbitrarily decided that nouns ending in r and s would be masculine and that those ending in a would be feminine (Thurot 1869:70). This notion may, of course, be questioned on the grounds that it is based on the premiss that language is a conscious contrivance, a view which has only in more recent times been definitively abandoned by scholars (but which, incidentally, most non-linguists still subscribe to).

In more recent times, the same notion (but purged of the idea that language is a contrivance) was stated by Karl Brugmann in a seminal article which appeared in 1889. Brugmann's general position is expressed in the following statement: 'If we stick to the unequivocally attested facts of the present and recent past of the Indo-European languages, we must maintain that masculine and feminine as grammatical genders are meaningless forms as far as the language of everyday life is concerned, and that the concepts of masculinity or femininity are not stimulated by them either in the real or the metaphorical sense of those terms' (Brugmann 1889:101).

But it would obviously be a mistake to push the theory too far, since there remain a certain number of recalcitrant facts which it has difficulty accounting for, such as the tendency of grammatical gender to follow natural gender to some degree. There must, therefore, be some psychological component at work in grammatical gender to explain developments of this kind.

Finally, let me say a few words about recent assertions that gender-systems serve to reinforce the economic and social inferiority of women. See, for instance, the article entitled 'De-sexing the English language,' by Miller and Swift which appeared in the first issue of the magazine Ms. in 1972. First of all, it seems clear to me, as I think it does to most professional linguists, that gender-systems are too deeply ingrained in those languages which have them to be radically transformed by government decree or even by concerted public action. A further complication in the case of English is that we are dealing with an unusually large speech-community spread over all five continents. Moreover, it is by no means obvious that altering the gender-system, even if it were feasible, would bring about or even contribute significantly to the emancipation of women. After all, women have been inferior to men socially and economically even in countries like Turkey and China where genderless languages have been spoken for centuries and perhaps millennia, a fact which indicates that

lack of grammatical gender does not guarantee sexual equality. In this connection, the reader might like to consult the interesting article by Gregersen (1979).

As citizens of a relatively free country, we must also recognize the fact that attempts by governments or by special interest groups to legislate linguistic usage inevitably cause resentment. One thinks of the outrage felt by the inhabitants of Alsace after the Nazi occupation of France in 1940 when they were compelled by decree to use the Nazi greeting Heil Hitler instead of the customary Bon jour. In the case we are considering here, hostile reactions undoubtedly play into the hands of those who are intent on blocking all attempts to raise the economic status of women. In the interests of the women's movement, therefore, it would seem advisable to avoid the slightest suspicion that a linguistic Diktat is being planned. In my judgement, the experience of the recent past has amply proved that bad tactics can sometimes ruin the prospects of the most deserving cause.

At the same time, an interesting theoretical issue is raised by the charge levelled by feminist groups that features of language can in some significant sense be regarded as 'sexist.' Thus, it has been suggested that an English word such as chairman falls into this category. But the justification for such a claim seems to be mainly etymological, namely the occurrence of the final syllable -man as a derivational morpheme. For in point of fact, the term has been applied indiscriminately to males and females for some time. Thus, the Oxford English Dictionary defines the word as follows: 'the person who is chosen to preside over a meeting, to conduct its proceedings, and who occupies the chair or seat provided for this function; the member of a corporate body appointed or elected to preside at its meetings, and in general to exercise the chief authority in the conduct of its affairs.' (Contrast that with the definition for sportsman: 'a man who follows, engages in, or practises sport.') It is interesting to note that the part of the dictionary containing words beginning with C was compiled between 1888 and 1893, a period which even antedates the suffragette movement. One fears that feminists have arbitrarily declared chairman (and other terms) sexist, without any serious attempt to consider the evidence.

The feminist movement may also be criticized for in some instances categorizing words as sexist for quite spurious reasons. Thus, there was a move a few years ago to introduce the word herstory, on the grounds that the word history contains the morpheme his. Many recent pronouncements about the sexist character of the word man, for instance, presuppose that it originally meant 'male' and was then extended to subsume all human beings, when in fact the reverse is the case. The prevailing meaning of the word in Old English was 'human being.' The usual words for male and female human being at that time were wer and wīf, respectively. (Waepman and wīfman were also in use.) Subsequently man supplanted wer, still seen in the first member of the noun compound werewolf (compare the cognates Latin vir 'adult male' and Sanskrit vīra 'hero'). I have even heard

arguments to the effect that the word woman contains as its first member the morpheme womb! Apart from the scientific invalidity of such assertions, they tend to discredit the feminist movement as a whole in many people's eyes (including, I may say, a great many women). In other words, language planning can easily turn into language blundering.

A further problem affecting all puristic efforts is that it is difficult to foresee how artificially introduced neologisms will actually be used. Thus, in the case of chairperson, nobody would have predicted ten years ago that it would end up being used to refer predominantly to female chairmen, and in this way becoming, in the truest sense, a sexist term. For while it is relatively easy to put a new word into circulation, it is impossible to control the way it is used in a large speech-community, and it is, unfortunately, the day-to-day use of a word which ultimately determines what it really means.

In general, all feminist arguments are based on two questionable premisses. The first is the notion that language is a conscious contrivance like, say, the internal combustion engine. If a gadget is faulty, it is thought, the only sensible thing is to repair it. I have alluded to this general conception above. Needless to say, it has no scientific basis. The second premiss is the so-called Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, i.e. the contention that language not only correlates with, but also exerts an influence on, culture, a theory which, despite its immense popularity over the past three centuries or more, has never been demonstrated. In these circumstances, it would seem to me as farfetched to claim that the use of the term chairman has adversely affected the employment opportunities of women, as it would be to suggest, if I may use a rather whimsical example, that the attitude of English speakers towards cows is mirrored in, and was determined by, the word cowslip!

In any case, there are positive counterarguments against the validity of the premiss itself. Economically, women appear to have fared somewhat better in Great Britain than in the United States (there have, for instance, been proportionately more women members of Parliament than women members of Congress), and this is surely a difference which cannot be attributed to language.

In closing, let me suggest that linguists might like to devote more attention to the phenomenon of gender-systems and their day-to-day functioning than they have done in the past. The naivete of much recent feminist language planning perhaps reflects to some degree the ignorance and indifference exhibited by professional linguists in this area. For instance, it is curious that we do not know the precise semantic difference between words for 'person' and words for 'human being' in languages like Russian which have unrelated monomorphemic lexical items with those two meanings (viz. lico and čelovek). Why does a language need two words for what appear to be such closely related concepts? May I, therefore, utter a plea for an increase of interest on the part of our profession in this vast but, I submit, challenging area?

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